

REPORT
OF
THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
OF
LEXINGTON,
FOR THE YEAR
1852-53.

BOSTON:
CROSBY, NICHOLS, AND COMPANY,
111 WASHINGTON STREET.
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CAMBRIDGE:

METCALF AND COMPANY, PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

REPORT.

DURING the past year the schools in our town have not been disturbed by a single instance of such gross insubordination on the part of a single scholar as called for any direct action from the Committee. Nor have they, in any case, been unsuccessful through the unfaithfulness of the teacher. It is something for which to be grateful, that each term has shown some advance on the part of the pupils. Even now, with all the increasing attention paid to general education, so much as this cannot in all cases, with truth, be said of the schools in our State. If your Committee dwell somewhat upon the deficiencies they have observed, it is because they know that the first step towards improvement must necessarily be a deep sense of these deficiencies, — because there is so strong a tendency in man to overlook his defects, — and because such deficiencies do really exist, though they may not be peculiar to our schools. There is no danger, in any case, that we shall be too much impressed with the importance of their correction.

If but little is said in praise of our schools, it is because the Committee think, that, except as an encouragement to make them better, no good can come from such praise, but that much harm may thence result, by leading us to be satisfied with the present condition of our schools, and by inducing us to suppose them to be better than they really are. So in both ways we may be brought to the conclusion that we have nothing to do for their improvement. The Committee are glad to state, that they have good reason to believe the schools

do, as a general thing, improve from year to year, and that their condition during the last year has been quite as good as, if not better than, the average for any number of years past.

The most general defect, existing more or less in every district in town, is a lack of interest, on the part of parents, in the real well-being of the schools. This is shown by the infrequency of their visits to them. The Registers, which are doubtless somewhat inaccurate in this matter, mention not more than two visits, made by *parents*, in all the schools in town, throughout the year.* While the Committee do not doubt that, within the school-room, the teacher, so long as he holds his place, should be permitted to govern alone, they are sure that the manifestation of interest by parents in occasional visits to the school, and in a free and full and friendly conversation on the studies, dispositions, habits, and government of their children, would be gratefully recognized by the teacher, — would make his hard work easier, would do very much to correct any prejudices against the teacher that may have been formed, — would help to keep him from making such mistakes as might impair or destroy his good influence, and would so increase his interest in, and attachment for, his calling, as to render him much more successful. Parents should bear in mind, that it belongs to them to take the first step in such a conversation: while in their whole intercourse with the teacher they should remember, that both are laboring for the same object, and so should, as much as possible, exclude harsh thoughts, and abstain from drawing unfavorable inferences from his errors.

This lack of interest is more clearly shown in the trifling causes for which parents often allow or oblige the absence of their children. The frequent instances of tardiness and absence in our schools, strongly call for the attention of parents and school districts. The School Committee have the power to prescribe rules in this matter. But it would, they thought, be useless, and perhaps prejudicial, for them to exercise that

* This remark does not, of course, include the closing examinations. These are usually quite well attended.

power without a more hearty coöperation, on the part of parents, than they could find reason to anticipate. Until public sentiment becomes more alive than it is, generally, in our country towns, they will, in this most important respect, be behind the large towns and cities. As soon as there is reason to suppose that the community by cheerful acquiescence will authorize it, the School Committee will, doubtless, gladly avail themselves of the opportunity to advance very much the interests of education, by prescribing rules that shall insist upon the punctual and constant attendance of the scholars. The more stringent parents desire such rules to be made, the better. They will be very unlikely to pass the bounds of reason. They will be quite likely to mistake on the side of leniency. As a general thing, the community is not aware of the hindrance a single scholar, by his absence, may be to the progress of his class. The instance in a school last winter is perhaps no remarkable one. Then, a class was obliged to go over the same ground on four successive days, at least. The teacher was explaining the use of the multiplication table, one day, to a young class. On the next day a scholar was present who had been away at the previous exercise. The teacher must go over the whole explanation with him; and to him alone must the time be given which had already been given, for this purpose, to the whole class on the previous day. On the next day yet another one came who had been absent on the two days before, and on the third still another. We need not wonder if the class grew listless and inattentive at last, nor if a repetition of such instances should deprive them of all interest in their study. It is easy for any one to perceive, if he will think a moment, that, with very rare exceptions, every instance of absence must be a great drawback to a whole class, if not to the whole school. So may one irregular child cause much injury to the school, and derive little or no advantage from it himself.

Parents, again, might with profit show an increased interest in the teacher's success, by occasionally inviting him to see them at their homes, — not merely giving a general invitation to drop in when convenient, which in most cases is little better,

practically, than no invitation at all, but appointing a time for the visit. And bearing in mind that, *alone*, he can toil with but little success, they should show him, by their personal treatment of him, that his services are prized, and his right efforts shall be seconded. He, with themselves, is the teacher, guide, governor, of their children. Certainly in no instance, therefore, will they take so strange a course as, before the child, and systematically, to take his part against the teacher. Nor yet make him the informer, or, child as he is, — with a child's passions, inclinations, short-sightedness, with his partial way of looking at and reporting what affects him, — make him the sole witness against the teacher.

The Committee have quite frequently called the attention of the several schools to the general neglect of a book that should at least be in the hands of every child of ten or twelve years of age. They would commend the same subject to the notice of parents. Surely there must be room for improvement in a school, when we are told what has been said of one, and what probably might be said of many, of the schools in town, that not more than two or three Dictionaries are to be found in it. A Dictionary like the Comprehensive Dictionary of Worcester should be at the disposal of every scholar old enough to use it. And he should be taught to use it, as well at home as at school, — should make it one of the treasures with which he is never in life to part, — nor cease to consult it till he has sounded the meaning of all the words with which he meets, or that he has occasion to use. It would be a curious and profitable matter for consideration, how much vague reasoning, and how much misunderstanding and consequent unjust and harsh feeling, have resulted from indefinite or incorrect ideas attached to words, — how many quarrels have hence sprung, and how many seeds of permanent alienation have so been sown. The Committee have been surprised to find how few words could be defined correctly in the several schools in town. The parrot-like repetition of words to which no meaning is attached must ever be an effectual bar against good reading. The Central Grammar School has been

the freest from this fault, and at its last examination the third class, particularly, acquitted itself very creditably.

While we are glad to say, that the order of no school has been *very* bad, we regret that we cannot say more than we may on this head. Good order is, of course, one of the first essentials of a good school. We should like, therefore, to say our schools were almost faultless in this respect. The Primary School in the Central District was as orderly, perhaps, as is desirable for a school of that class. The West School also, the Northeast Winter School and the Summer School in the South District, the first named especially, have done very well.

One of the most important exercises in our common schools is that of reading. We have already referred to a hindrance to success in this exercise that we hope soon to see removed. The most important preparation for the quite *young* scholar, certainly, is the ability to modulate the voice so as readily to give any required tone or sound. This must be the result of much painstaking on the part of the teacher, and many exercises on the part of the scholar. The teacher in the Primary School in the Southeast District has been highly successful in this. Her first class, for its age, is superior to any other in town. There is too common a tendency for teachers to allow their scholars to pass over more ground than they can go over with thoroughness. It is irksome to insist upon exactness in details. Scholars find it tedious so to perfect themselves, and parents are too apt to measure a child's diligence and proficiency by the number of pages he has gone over in a given time. The Committee found that the Winter School in the Northeast District had avoided this mistake. The class in Algebra bore well a very detailed and thorough examination. The Summer School in the South District, the two Grammar and the two Primary Schools, and the West School, are to be in general commended for this. The class in Mental Arithmetic in the last-named school appeared remarkably well. A class of young scholars went through long processes in their minds, without the aid even of the question-book, in a manner that would have done credit to some of our most advanced scholars.

The teachers in the Centre Grammar and in the Summer

School in the South District are to be especially commended for their exercise of skill in leading the scholars to comprehend the studies pursued, and for the interest the scholars seemed, consequently, to take in their exercises. The teachers also in the Southeast Schools are to be prized for the interest they take in their calling, and for the efforts they make to be faithful. From the manifest improvement made by the teacher of the Grammar School during the past year in skill and in enforcing order, and from the unanimity and support he receives from the district, all springing from his devotion to the school, the Committee anticipate yet better things, for the year to come, from the school, than the last year has produced.

Whatever doubt there may be about the propriety of offering prizes for success in any school exercise, on account of unfavorable moral results, it seems evident that a prize offered to the one who should make most advancement in penmanship in the South Winter School, excited a zeal that led to very marked improvement in that respect. The writing-books showed that the school had improved more than any other in town in this branch.

The Committee would recognize the liberality of the town in its appropriations for common school education. Probably as large a sum is appropriated for instruction as is really needed for that purpose, for the present. Certainly the schools have been kept for as large a portion of the year as the highest good of the child requires. What is more needed, we would repeat, than any thing else now, is that lively interest taken in the studies, and in the docility, orderliness, and respectful manners of their children, by parents, which shall lead them actively to second the efforts of the teacher. In the two village schools especially, as in village schools generally, the latter part of this remark will apply. The Committee have observed in their visits some approach towards pertness, some lack of modest deference, which cannot be corrected by the teacher, if he works alone. The part of a wise parent would seem to be to second all judicious efforts that the teacher may make to correct whatever he may discover that is offensive in a child's demeanor, wherever it may be observed.

The Committee are convinced that in no other way can a sense of what is proper and becoming in a child's general conduct and bearing towards his superiors be made so delicate, as by a proper inculcation of his moral and religious obligations by both parent and teacher. They do not suppose the matter has been entirely overlooked, yet they think teachers would do well to observe still more faithfully the *law of the State* that requires all instructors of youth

"To exert their best endeavor to impress on the minds of children and youth committed to their care and instruction, the principles of piety, justice, and a sacred regard to truth, love to their country, humanity, and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, and frugality, and those other virtues which are the ornament of human society, and the basis upon which a republican constitution is founded; and it shall be the duty of such instructors to endeavor to lead their pupils, as their ages and capacities will admit, into a clear understanding of the tendency of the above-mentioned virtues, to preserve and perfect a republican constitution, and secure the blessings of liberty, as well as to promote their future happiness, and also to point out to them the evil tendency of the opposite vices."

For the Committee,

WILLIAM F. BRIDGE,	<i>Secretary.</i>
IRA LELAND,	
HOWLAND HOLMES,	
WILLIAM F. BRIDGE,	<i>} School Committee of Lexington.</i>

TABULAR VIEW.

DISTRICTS.	TEACHERS.	Months in Summer.	Months in Winter.	Total.	Whole Number of Scholars in Summer.	Average Attendance in Summer.	Whole Number of Scholars in Winter.	Average Attendance in Winter.	Wages per Month in Summer.	Wages per Month in Winter.	Scholars over Fifteen Years of Age, in Summer.	Scholars over Fifteen Years of Age, in Winter.
Centre Grammar,	{ L. B. Hanaford,	} 5	5	10	54	36	36	28	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	2	2
Centre Primary,	{ Ira Leland,*											
Southeast Grammar,	{ Sarah E. Richardson,											
Southeast Primary,	{ John B. Marston,											
	{ Susan E. Rice,	5	5	10	49	39	55	49	50.00	50.00	3	5
South, . . .	{ George G. Parker,	} 6½	3	9½	45	36	39	34	20.00	35.00	7	5
West, . . .	{ M. A. Merriam,											
	{ Lucy A. Downing,	5	5	10	40	25⅔	40	24⅔	20.00	22.00		1
North, . . .	{ Elijah M. Hussey,	} 5½	3⅔	8⅔	35	24⅔	35	30⅔	20.00	37.50		3
	{ Elizabeth N. Locke,*											
	{ L. A. Hussey,											
Northeast, . .	{ Charles Tidd,	} 5	3¼	8¾	28	20	37	33	20.00	40.00		5
	{ Lucy B. Fiske,											
									20.00			

* Mr. Leland and Miss Locke were employed for a few weeks to finish schools which were given up by the former teachers that they might so fulfil other engagements.